

Per Bak Jensen

Per Bak Jensen

Sene Samtaler // Late Conversations

På tærsklen til det ukendte: Per Bak Jensens fotografiske opdagelsesrejser

Vores jord er ikke stille. Selv hvis man filtrerer al den larm fra, som vi mennesker laver. Selv hvis man fjerner alle lydene. Som dem, der forårsages af solstorme eller jordskælv. Eller fra eksterne elektromagnetiske felter. Selv uden dem laver vores jord en lyd. Måske er den forårsaget af bølgernes bevægelse i havet. Det er ikke sikkert. Forskere og pressen har nogle gange omtalt denne lyd på engelsk som et "hum", dvs. som en summen eller brummen. Lyden kan dog ikke opfattes af det menneskelige øre, da dens frekvens er for lav. Den er overladt til vores fantasi, og enhver beskrivelse er kun et vagt forsøg, en hjælpe løs konstruktion født af en først efter viden og viljen til at forstå vores omstændigheder.

Per Bak Jensen henviser ikke eksplisit til denne tone i jorden, som videnskaben har opdaget, i sit fotografiske arbejde. Alligevel er det let at se en forbindelse. Ikke kun fordi Per, når han taler om sine billeder, nogle gange selv bringer lyde, sange eller toner ind i samtaLEN. Men først og fremmest fordi han bruger den slags metaforer til at tale om noget, som han mistænker for at ligge bag virkelighedens synlige facade. For at beskrive sin følelse af, at der er noget midt iblandt os, på en jord, som han mener har sine egne skjulte forhåbninger. Et miljø, som man kan finde mening i. Selv om han ikke betragter det som noget religiøst, henviser han nogle gange til en tilstedeværelse, som kommer i kontakt med os, og som vi kan høre, siger Per, hvis bare vi bliver stille og lytter godt nok efter.

Den menneskelige hjerne har sine grænser for det kendte og den forudgående videnskabelig viden, og netop disse begrænsninger korrelerer, når fotografen Per Bak Jensen visualiserer denne faktor af de store ukendte variabler. Det er i hvert fald sådan, jeg forstår ham. Søgningen efter en bagvedliggende orden, efter de faste sandheder og regler for vores verden, er karakteristisk for menneskeheden og er blevet initieret fra mange sider: fra filosofien, teologien og fra naturvidenskaben. Selv Per Bak Jensen ønsker ikke at lægge sig fast på, hvad dette er, og hvordan det skal håndteres. Hans valgte medie er dog i sidste ende – eller rettere: i omkring seks årtier – fotografiet. Men han stiller et klart krav til videnskaben. Forskerne er nødt til at forstå, at vi er en del af naturen og ikke kan se os selv isoleret fra den. Mennesket er naturen. Alt er natur i begyndelsen og i slutningen, eller noget i den stil, fortalte han mig igen og igen.

Disse indledende sætninger skal give en fornemmelse af en motivation, der driver Per Bak Jensens fotografiske arbejde og forbinder hans tidligste fotografier med hans seneste. Hvis man skulle beskrive det som en personlig søgen efter mening, så ville han nok bekære det. Men det betyder på ingen måde, at han ikke ser beskuerne som involverede. At de måske ikke lægger mærke til, at vi udenforstående også kan komme dybere ind i billederne. At vi måske ikke er klar over, at resultatet af hans søgen på en eller anden måde kan berøre os. Fotografen vil dog ikke give meget hjælp. Når Per Bak Jensen taler med beskuerne om sine motiver, holder han sig bevidst tilbage med fakta og fortolkninger for at give plads til indtryk. Uden at vide mere om Per Bak Jensens fotografi er der ting, som også – og måske

endda kun – afsløres på beskuerniveau. Hvilke detaljer er genkendelige i de nedfaldne efterårsblade, hvoraf nogle klamrer sig trøstesløst til et blåt plasticark, og andre har nået deres destination, de fugtige stikke på en eng? Hvor vandrer tankerne hen, når man, vildledt af en titel, forestiller sig at blive transporteret til Grønlands arktiske riger, men i virkeligheden ser på den iskolde, tågeindhyllede havn i Korsør? Hvilke spørgsmål rejser sig bag det synliges kappe? Det er tydeligt, at Per Bak Jensens fotografiske opdagelsesrejser også kan føre os ind i nye indre territorier. Når et fyrtårn på øen Rügen trækker vores blik dybere og dybere ind i billedet, mens dagslyset forsvinder, virker det nemt at trænge ind under billedets overflade – og måske åbne op for ukendte rum i os selv.

En tur gennem denne udstilling, som samler fotografier fra fem årtier, afslører Per Bak Jensens evige interesser. Der er forskellige cirkler af motiver, som kan virke forskellige, men som han selv kan spore tilbage til et enkelt ord. Efter hans mening viser alle hans billeder naturen. Begrebet landskabsfotografi er ikke bundet til det naturlige. Men selv hvis det var tilfældet, svarer Per Bak Jensen med, at alt engang har været et naturmateriale i sin oprindelse, hvis man bare trækker sporene langt nok tilbage. Er det så enkelt? Naturen er i det uberoede landskab såvel som i den byggede kulisse i en zoologisk have. Naturen i den overskyede bjergtop såvel som i det menneskeskabte parklandskab. Naturen er i efterårsblade såvel som i stenskulpturer. - Ja, så enkelt er det.

Hvad har disse billeder ellers til fælles? En del af naturen, mennesket, ser vi ikke i hans fotografier. Kun meget sjældent har Per Bak Jensen portrætteret dem. Når vi ser en tiger slumre i sin indhegning, kan vi tage dette faktum personligt og relatere det til vores art. Men mennesket er stadig unægteligt til stede i billederne. Han har sat sit præg, han har en finger med i spillet, han er en del af fotografiet gennem sit – nej, Pers- synspunkt, hvor han positionerer sig i forhold til det, han ser. Lad mig illustrere det med det mest oplagte eksempel: Per Bak Jensens kunstneriske gennembrud anses af mange for at være en udstilling på det københavnske galleri GARI i 1988. Udstillingen med titlen "Den gådefulde by" samlede sort-hvide fotografier af øde byparker, kirkegårde, museumshaver og monumenter i hovedstaden. Et sølvgelatineprint fra serien kan også ses i den aktuelle udstilling: statuen af en englefugl set bagfra, trøstesløst omgivet af den planlagte og pacificerede vækst af bar vintervegetation. Der er ikke noget menneske at se, men er der noget i billedet, som ikke peger på det?

Hvad ellers? Det er steder, hvor Per Bak Jensen har haft en fornemmelse af, at der var noget skjult i baggrunden, noget, der kaldte på ham og krævede hans opmærksomhed. På den baggrund er det forståeligt, at han ikke så meget ser sig selv som skaber af kunstværker, men snarere som modtager af et budskab, der er indlejet i det, der omgiver os. Hans enestående blik for perspektiv, hans fornemmelse for lys og skygge og hans enorme dybdeskarphed har måske gjort Per Bak Jensen berømt i de seneste årtier. I årenes løb har

han trukket sig mere og mere tilbage som person, fortalte han mig. Netop fordi han ser sig selv mere som en formidler. I sidste ende tilhører fotografierne alligevel ikke ham længere, siger han. "De tilhører de mennesker, der har brug for dem."

Når Per Bak Jensen overfører hverdagsagtige, til tider triste, udsigter til sin egen stil, opfordrer han os til at være opmærksomme. Og ikke på en esoterisk eller selvoptimerende måde. Det er hans enkle anbefaling af en tilstand, der tager højde for, at der er ting, vi ikke ved, processer, vi ikke begriber, love, vi ikke forstår – måske ikke endnu, måske aldrig – og alligevel er de der. Meget af dette er henvist til den empiriske forskning, noget af det resulterer i teologiske forklaringsforsøg eller filosofiske udledninger. Det, de har til fælles, er den menneskelige nysgerrighed efter at dechiffrere det, der er skjult: for måske i sidste ende at gøre noget synligt, der organiserer eller holder vores miljø sammen i dets kerne. For at kunne relatere mennesker til naturen som en del af den. Eller for at åbne op for adgangen til det ukendte i os selv. Per Bak Jensens mål virker uopnåelige. Når han ser tilbage, føler han sig ikke mere avanceret i dag, end han gjorde i begyndelsen af sin karriere. Det synes han ikke er en dårlig ting. Du kan gætte det: Som det ofte er tilfældet, er rejsen destinationen.

Dr. Katrin Hippel



Hunting Scene I, 1999
[PBJ-99-009]



Rovdyr / Predator, 2023
[PBJ-23-002]



Løfte / Promise, 2023
[PBJ-23-004]



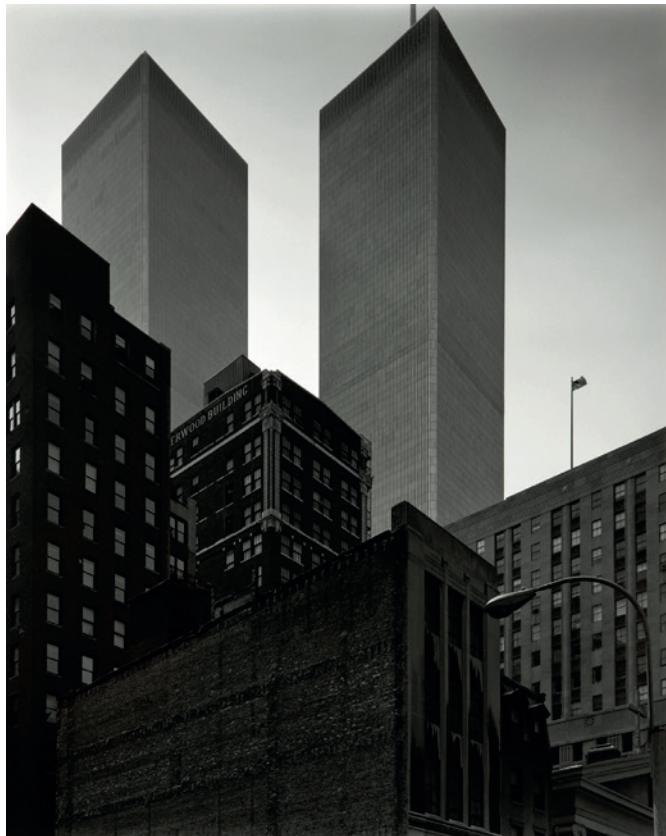
Erkendelse / Realization, 2024
[PBJ-24-003]



Morgenlandet / The Land of the Morning
[PBJ-24-002]



Roma, 2024
[PBJ-24-001]



World Trade, 1990
[PBJ-90-013]



Engel / Angel, 1988
[PBJ-88-011]





Dreaming Greenland, 2006
[PBJ-06-019]



Monument Valley II, 2006
[PBJ-06-010]

On the threshold of the unknown: Per Bak Jensen's photographic explorations

Our earth is not silent. Even if you filter out all the sounds we humans make. Even if you take out all the noises. Like those caused by solar storms or earthquakes. Or from external electromagnetic fields. Even without them, our earth makes a sound. Perhaps it is caused by the movement of the waves in the ocean. This is not certain. Researchers and the press have sometimes referred to this sound as a "hum". However, the sound is not perceivable to the human ear, its frequency is too low. It is left to our imagination, and any description is only a vague attempt, a helpless construct born of a thirst for knowledge and the will to understand our circumstances.

Per Bak Jensen does not explicitly refer to this tone of the Earth, discovered by science, in his photographic work. And yet a connection is easily made. Not only because when Per talks about his pictures, he sometimes brings sounds, songs or tones into the conversation himself. But above all because he uses this kind of metaphor to talk about something that he suspects lies behind the visible façade of reality. To describe his feeling that something lies in our midst, on an earth that he believes has its own hidden aspirations. An environment that one could make sense of. Even if he does not regard this as a religious thing, he sometimes refers to a presence that comes into contact with us and that we could hear, Per says, if only we become quiet and listen carefully enough.

The connecting element to the aforementioned sound of the earth probably lies in this feeling. The human brain reaching the limits of the known and of previous scientific knowledge, correlate with that, when the photographer Per Bak Jensen visualizes this factor of the great unknown variables. At least that is how I understand him. The search for an underlying order, for the tense truths and rules of our world, is characteristic of humanity and has been initiated from many sides: from philosophy, theology, and from the natural sciences. Even Per Bak Jensen does not want to commit himself to what this something is and how it should be dealt with. His chosen medium, however, is ultimately - or rather: for around six decades - photography. However, he makes a clear demand of science. Researchers need to understand that we are part of nature and cannot view ourselves isolated from it. Man is nature. Everything is nature in the beginning and in the end, or something like that, he told me again and again in these or different words.

These introductory sentences are intended to convey a sense of a driving force that fuels Per Bak Jensen's photographic work and connects his earliest photographs with his latest. If one were to describe this as a personal search for meaning, then he would probably affirm this. However, this in no way means that he sees the viewers as uninvolved. That they might not notice that we outsiders can also get deeper into the images. That we might not realize that the outcome of his search could somehow concern us. However, the photographer will not provide much help. When Per Bak Jensen talks to viewers about his motifs, he deliberately holds back with facts and interpretations in order to leave room for

perception. Without knowing more about Per Bak Jensen's photography, there are things that are also - and perhaps even only - revealed at the viewing level. What details are recognizable in the fallen autumn leaves, some of which cling desolately to a blue plastic sheet and some of which have reached their destination, the damp stalks of a meadow? Where does the mind wander when, misled by a title, one imagines oneself transported to the arctic realms of Greenland and yet is actually looking at the icy, fog-shrouded harbor of Korsør? What questions arise behind the cloak of the visible? It is clear that Per Bak Jensen's photographic explorations can also take us into new inner territory. When a lighthouse on the island of Rügen draws our gaze deeper and deeper into the picture as daylight fades, it seems like a small step to penetrate the surface of the picture – and possibly open up unknown spaces within ourselves.

A walk through this exhibition, which brings together photographs from five decades, reveals Per Bak Jensen's perennial interests. Represented are various circles of motifs that may seem diverse, but which he himself can trace back to a single word. In his opinion, all his pictures show nature. The concept of landscape photography is not bound to the natural. But even if this were the case, Per Bak Jensen responds with the idea that everything was once a natural material in its origin, if one only traces the path back far enough. Is it that simple? Nature is in the untouched landscape as well as in the built backdrop of a zoo. Nature in the cloudy mountain summit as well as in the man-made park landscape. Nature is in autumn leaves as well as in stone sculptures. – Yes, it's that simple.

What else do these pictures have in common? There is one part of nature, the human being, that we do not see in his photographs. Only very rarely has Per Bak Jensen portrayed them. Looking at a tiger slumbering in its enclosure, we can take this fact personally and relate it to our species. But man is still undeniably present in the pictures. He has left his mark, he has a hand in the game, he is part of the photograph through his - no, Per's - point of view, positioning himself in relation to what he sees. Let me illustrate this with the most obvious example: Per Bak Jensen's artistic breakthrough is considered by many to be an exhibition at the Copenhagen gallery GARI in 1988. The show entitled "Den gådefulde by" brought together black and white photographs of deserted city parks, cemeteries, museum gardens and monuments of the capital. A silver gelatin print from the series can also be seen in this current exhibition: the statue of an angelic figure seen from behind, desolately surrounded by the planned and pacified growing of bare winter vegetation. There is no human being to be seen, but is there anything in the picture that does not point to him?

What else? These are places where Per Bak Jensen had the feeling that there was something hidden in the background, something that concerned him and demanded his attention. With that in mind, it is understandable that he sees himself not so much as a creator of works of art, but rather as the recipient of a message that is ingrained in what

surrounds us. His keen eye for perspective, his sense of light and shadow and his immense depth of field may have made Per Bak Jensen famous over the past decades. Over the years, he has withdrawn more and more as a person, he told me. Precisely because he sees himself more as a mediator. In the end, the photographs no longer belong to him anyway, he says. "They belong to the people who need them."

When Per Bak Jensen translates mundane, sometimes dreary, views into his own style, he calls on us to be mindful. And not in an esoteric or self-optimizing way. It is his simple recommendation for a state that takes into account that there are things that we do not know, processes that we do not apprehend, laws that we do not understand - perhaps not yet, perhaps never – and yet they are there. Much of this is assigned to the field of empirical research, some of it results in theological attempts at explanation or philosophical derivations. What they have in common is the human curiosity to decipher what is hidden: to perhaps ultimately make something visible that organizes or holds our environment together at its core. In order to relate humans to nature as part of it. Or to open up access to the unknown within ourselves. Per Bak Jensen's goals seem unattainable. Looking back, he doesn't feel any more advanced today than he did at the beginning of his career. He doesn't think that's a bad thing. You can guess it: As often is the case, the journey is the destination.

Dr. Katrin Hippel



Ved Eqip Sermia gletcheren / By the Eqip Sermia
[PBJ-06-003]



Fyrtårn / Lighthouse, 2008
[PBJ-08-006]





Bjerg – Liverpool Land /
Mountain – Liverpool Land, 2011
[PBJ-11-002]

PER BAK JENSEN

- 1949 Born 22 April in Copenhagen
1980 - 1986 The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen
1986 - 2009 Associate professor at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen

Lives and works on Stevns, Denmark

Selected Public Collections

- ARKEN Museum of Contemporary Art; Ishøj, Denmark
Aros; Aarhus, Denmark
Bibliothèque Nationale; Paris, France
Bornholm Art Museum; Gudhjem, Denmark
Brandts – Museum of Art and Visual Culture; Odense, Denmark
De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art; Tilburg, Holland
Esbjerg Art Museum; Esbjerg, Denmark
Hallands Konstmuseum; Halmstad, Sweden
HEART – Herning Museum of Contemporary Art; Herning, Denmark
International Center of Photography; New York City, USA
Louisiana – Museum of Modern Art; Humlebæk, Denmark
Metropolitan Museum of Art; New York City, USA
Moderna Museet; Stockholm, Sweden
Museum Kunst der Westküste, Föhr, Germany
Museum of Modern Art (MoMa), New York City, USA
Museum Salling; Skive, Denmark
Nasjonalmuseet; Oslo, Norway
National Museum of Photography/Royal Library; Copenhagen, Denmark
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek; Copenhagen, Denmark
Sorø Art Museum; Sorø, Denmark
SKMU – Sørlandets Art Museum; Kristiansand, Norway
National Gallery of Denmark; Copenhagen, Denmark

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2024 Sene Samtaler, Galleri Bo Bjerggaard, Copenhagen, Denmark
2023 Humming Earth, Museum Kunst der Westküste, Föhr, Germany
2022 Vidnesbyrd / Testimony, Galleri Bo Bjerggaard, Copenhagen, Denmark
2020 Vartegn II/ Sign II, Ekely, Copenhagen, Denmark

- 2019 Aftenland / Evening Land, Galleri Bo Bjerggaard, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2017 Himmelgåde / Celestial Enigma, Sørlandets Kunstmuseum, Kristiansand, Norway
- 2016 Dagslys / Daylight, Galleri Bo Bjerggaard, Copenhagen, Denmark
Vartegn / Sign, Ekely, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2015 Skjult / Hidden, Sorø Kunstmuseum, Denmark
- 2013 ECHO – Per Bak Jensen i dialog med Fyns Kunstmuseum
- 2012 Near and Far, Europe House, London, UK
Fortabelse / Lost, Galleri Bo Bjerggaard, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2011 Bevægelse / Movement, Kunsthallen Gl. Holtegaard, Holte, Denmark
Bevægelse / Movement, Maison du Danemark, Paris, France
- 2010 Signe et Mouvement, Galerie Suzanne Tarasiève, Paris, France
Tornbilleder, Glasgangen, Løgumkloster Refugium, Løgumkloster, Denmark
Per Bak Jensen - Obra Reciente, El Centro Fotográfico Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Mexico
- 2009 Before the Darkness, Dunkers Kulturhus, Helsingborg, Sweden
In our Midst, Galleri Bo Bjerggaard, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2008 Tilsagn / Promise, Kunstforeningen Det Ny Kastet, Thisted, Denmark
- 2006 Days in Vienna, Galleri Bo Bjerggaard, Copenhagen, Denmark
Genkomst / Return, Aros, Århus, Denmark
The Secret Room, Kristiansund Kunstforening, Kristiansund, Norway
Per Bak Jensen, SMK, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2004 Figure and Landscape, Galleri Bo Bjerggaard, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2003 Image no. 7, Trapolt Art Museum, Kolding, Denmark
- 2002 Visual Offences, Heart Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark
- 2001 Per Bak Jensen, Galleri Niklas von Bartha, London, UK
- 2000 Pure Nature, Galleri von Bartha, Basel, Switzerland
Surrounding, Sønderborg Slot, Denmark / Surrounding, Sorø Kunstmuseum, Denmark
New Zealand, Albertslund Town Hall, Denmark
- 1998 Wandering, Stalke Galleri, Copenhagen, Denmark
New Zealand, Sarjeant Galleri, Whanganui, New Zealand
Bringing out, Esbjerg Kunstmuseum, Denmark
- 1997 Bringing out, Arken Museum of Modern Art, Ishøj, Denmark
- 1996 Pilgrim Pictures, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Loggia, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 1995 Politikens Tryk, Politikens Galleri, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 1993 The Being of Places, Louisiana, Humlebæk, Denmark
(on the occasion of publishing of the book Stedernes Væsen/The Being of Places)
- 1992 New Photographs, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 1991 Amager Pictures, Traneudstilling Gentofte Kunstmuseum, Denmark
- 1990 Project the Elevated Railway, Nørrebro railway station, Copenhagen, Denmark

- 1989 Per Bak Jensen 1989, Fotomuseet Brandts Klædefabrik, Odense, Denmark
1988 The Mysterious City, Galleri GAR!, Copenhagen, Denmark
1985 Per Bak Jensen 1985, Galleri A Gruppen, Copenhagen, Denmark
1981 Per Bak Jensen 1981, Galleri Image, Århus, Denmark

Selected Projects

A.P. Møller-Mærsk; Rolighed, Skodsborg, Denmark
Danish Parliament; Copenhagen, Denmark
Denmark's National Bank; Copenhagen, Denmark
Herlev Hospital; Centre for Meditation and Faith, Denmark
Holte, Parish Community Centre; Holte, Denmark
Hospice Djursland; Rønde, Denmark
KPMG; Copenhagen, Denmark
Odense, Parish Community Centre; Thomas Kingo's Church, Denmark
Plesner Cobber Tower; Copenhagen, Denmark
University College Campus; Silkeborg, Denmark
University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Vartov Community Centre; Copenhagen, Denmark

Grants and Awards

Thorvaldsen Medal
Eckersberg Medal
Danish Arts Foundation Honorary Grant

Per Bak Jensen

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8 March – 13 April 2024

Værker / Works

Per Bak Jensen
Ved Eqip Sermia gletcheren / By
the Eqip Sermia glaicer, 2006
C-print / Diasec
124 cm x 164 cm x 4 cm; 3/6
PBJ-06-003

Per Bak Jensen
Roma, 2024
C-print / Mat Diasec
125 cm x 173 cm x 4 cm; 1/6
PBJ-24-001

Per Bak Jensen
Monument Valley II, 2006
Ultra chrome print
93,6 cm x 119,6 cm x 4,0 cm; 2/6
PBJ-06-010

Per Bak Jensen
Morgenlandet / The Land of the
Morning, 2024
C-print / Mat Diasec
125 cm x 173 cm x 4 cm; 1/6
PBJ-24-002

Per Bak Jensen
Dreaming Greenland, 2006
C-print / Diasec
124 cm x 348 cm x 4 cm; 2/3
PBJ-06-019

Per Bak Jensen
Erkendelse / Realization, 2024
C-print / Mat Diasec
125 cm x 173 cm x 4 cm; 1/6
PBJ-24-003

Per Bak Jensen
Fyrtårn / Lighthouse, 2008
Rügen
C-print / Diasec
156 cm x 205 cm; 2/3
PBJ-08-006

Per Bak Jensen
Engel / Angel, 1988
Den gådefulde by
Silverprint
63 cm x 75 cm x 3 cm; 1 AP
PBJ-88-011

Per Bak Jensen
Bjerg - Liverpool Land / Moun-
tain- Liverpool Land, 2011
Diasec Face matt
165 cm x 229 cm x 4 cm; 1/3
PBJ-11-002

Per Bak Jensen
World Trade, 1990
Silverprint
75 cm x 63 cm; eget tryk
PBJ-90-013

Per Bak Jensen
Rovdyr / Predator, 2023
C-print / Mat Diasec
125 cm x 173 cm x 4 cm; 1/6
PBJ-23-002

Per Bak Jensen
Hunting Scene I, 1999
Hunting Scene
C-print
76 cm x 126 cm; 2/3
PBJ-99-009

Per Bak Jensen
Løfte / Promise, 2023
C-print / Mat Diasec
125 cm x 173 cm x 4 cm; 2/6
PBJ-23-004

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